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Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2017/228 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. The present report provides an overview of the ongoing work of the Expert Group for the implementation of the global indicator framework for the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This encompasses a description of the activities undertaken by the Group pursuant to Statistical Commission decision 48/101, including (a) methodological development of tier III indicators and updates to the tier classification; (b) annual refinements of some indicators and a timeline for the 2020 comprehensive review; (c) guidelines and best practices on data flows and global data reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals; and (d) work carried out in the data disaggregation work stream and by the working groups on interlinkages, Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) and geospatial information. The Commission will also have before it a background document on the guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Statistical Commission is invited to comment on progress made by the Expert Group and the direction of future work. The points for discussion by the Commission are set out in paragraph 34 of this present report.

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Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

I. Introduction

1. As mandated in General Assembly resolution 70/1, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators has been tasked to develop and implement the global indicator framework for the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Expert Group, whose formation was endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session (decision 46/101), submitted an initial global indicator framework to the Commission at its forty-seventh session in March 2016. The Commission, in its decision 47/101, agreed, as a practical starting point, with the proposed global indicator framework, subject to future technical refinement.

2. The Expert Group examined possible refinements of the global indicator framework pursuant to Statistical Commission decision 47/101 and proposed a revised global indicator framework at the forty-eighth session of the Commission. The Commission, in its decision 48/101, agreed on the revised global indicator framework for the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including refinements on several indicators, and stressed that that agreement fulfilled substantially the promise of delivering a global indicator framework for the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, as requested by the General Assembly. At its forty-eighth session, the Commission recommended to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of a draft resolution containing the global indicator framework.

3. At its 2017 session, the Economic and Social Council, in its decision 2017/228 of 7 June 2017, took note of the report of the Statistical Commission on its forty-eighth session which contained the draft resolution recommended for adoption by the Council. At its seventy-first session, on 6 July 2017, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/313, in which it took note of the work of the Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adopted the global indicator framework as a voluntary and country-led instrument that includes the initial set of indicators to be refined annually and reviewed comprehensively by the Commission at its fifty-first session, to be held in 2020, and its fifty-sixth session, to be held in 2025, and will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels, which would be developed by Member States.

4. The present report describes the work carried out by the Expert Group from March 2017 to December 2017 for the implementation of the global indicator framework, on the basis of the work programme agreed by the Commission and in accordance with Statistical Commission decision 48/101.

II. Implementation of the global indicator framework

5. In 2017, the Expert Group held two physical meetings, each attended by some 150 representatives from member countries, observer countries, international and regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector. Between meetings, the Expert Group continued to interact electronically and through teleconferences.

6. The fifth meeting of the Expert Group, hosted by Statistics Canada, was held in Ottawa from 28 to 31 March 2017. The sixth meeting, hosted by the Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies of Bahrain, was held in Manama from 11 to 14 November 2017. At those two meetings, the Expert Group discussed progress made on the methodological development of tier III indicators and reviewed and updated the tier classification; reviewed annual refinements for a few selected indicators; discussed the proposed guidelines on data flows and global data reporting and the data-collection calendar; reviewed the work carried out by the work stream on data disaggregation and the three working groups; and shared experiences on Sustainable Development Goal implementation and reporting at national, regional, global and thematic levels.

7. In accordance with the revised terms of reference of the Expert Group and the mechanism for the rotation of its membership and chairmanship, as agreed by the Statistical Commission in its decision 48/101, in May 2017, new members of the Expert Group were nominated through existing regional mechanisms. Annex I to the present report sets out the updated membership of the Group. At the sixth meeting, Albina Chuwa (United Republic of Tanzania) was elected co-chair of the Expert Group, replacing Lisa Bersales (Philippines) and joining Enrique Ordaz (Mexico) in leading the work of the Group.

A. Review of the tier classification and methodology for development of tier III indicators

8. At its fifth meeting, the Expert Group clarified the criteria and definitions for tier classification, as follows:

(a) Tier I: indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology and available standards, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and for 50 per cent of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant;

(b) Tier II: indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology and available standards, but data are not regularly produced by countries;

(c) Tier III: no internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology or standards are being (or will be) developed or tested.

9. In accordance with the mechanism for updating the classification of the indicators, the Expert Group reviewed the tier classification of the indicators during its fifth and sixth meetings. The Group focused particularly on indicators that had been refined and approved at the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission, tier III indicators for which sufficient advancements in methodological development had been achieved, and all tier I and II indicators based on data availability at the global and regional levels.

10. Tier classification was reviewed at the fifth meeting of the Group for the 11 refined indicators in the revised global indicator framework, as adopted at the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission. Ten were classified tier III indicators and 1 was classified as a tier II indicator based on their methodological development and data availability at the global level. In addition, five indicators modified within the context of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 were

reviewed at the same meeting, of which four were classified as tier II indicators and one as a tier III indicator.

11. As significant progress has been made in the methodological development of many tier III indicators, there were several requests for the reclassification of tier III indicators which were considered by the Expert Group. In advance of the meetings of the Expert Group, agencies were invited to provide, at least one month before the meeting, supporting documents for the reclassification of tier III indicators, which were to include (a) a request summary of from one to two pages in length; (b) draft metadata; (c) a full methodology development narrative (including a list of pilot countries, data and other results emanating from the pilot studies); and (d) any other relevant material. It was intended that the documents would provide information on the nature of the involvement of the national statistical system and, in particular, national statistical offices in methodology development and on when the methodology had been accepted as an international standard. At the fifth meeting of the Group, 12 indicators were reviewed for reclassification, with 4 being moved to tier II. At the sixth meeting of the Group and a subsequent WebEx meeting, owing to advancements in methodological development, a further 29 tier III indicators were reviewed for reclassification, of which 17 were reclassified in tier II. The Group provided feedback to custodian agencies on those indicators that could not be reclassified, indicating the specific methodological work that would need to be conducted before reclassification could be reconsidered.

12. Pursuant to the approved work programme of the Expert Group, a review of the availability of data for tier I and II indicators was conducted. Data availability as of 28 August 2017 for all tier I and II indicators was reviewed in the global indicator database in order to assess country and population coverage for each region where the indicator was relevant. The assessment concluded that eight tier I indicators did not have sufficient data coverage and should therefore be moved to tier II and that 19 Tier II indicators met the criteria for classification to tier I.

13. Based on the updates to the tier classification following these reviews, as of 1 December 2017, the updated tier classification comprised 93 tier I indicators, 66 tier II indicators and 68 tier III indicators. In addition, there were five indicators classified in multiple tiers (that is, different components of those indicators were classified in different tiers). The updated tier classification is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/.

14. Given the large number of tier reclassification requests received in advance of the Expert Group meetings and the urgent need to reclassify an indicator when methodological development had advanced, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group revised its mechanism for updating the classification of indicators. When requirements are met, the review of reclassification requests will be conducted throughout the year, at the two physical meetings and WebEx meetings, based on a calendar developed by the Group. The Group plans to hold Webex meetings every two months, if needed, to review tier reclassification requests. Custodian agencies are required to provide their supporting documents at least one month in advance of these meetings to ensure that the members of the Group have sufficient time to review all documents.

15. In accordance with its work programme (see E/CN.3/2017/2, para. 35 (a)), the Expert Group developed procedures for the review of workplans for tier III indicators. Throughout the year, the Group conducted a thorough review of tier III workplans, flagging any issues in the current methodological work, in particular for those making reference to targets with a 2020 deadline. Key issues identified by the Group included

(a) workplans or timelines requiring more clarification; (b) timelines for some workplans that would not meet the 2020 deadline; (c) workplans whose methodology was already complete and under which data collection had begun; and (d) workplans with limited information or under which methodological development had not yet begun. The Group followed up with the custodian agencies on the issues identified.

16. Agencies were invited to provide updated workplans to ensure the acceleration of methodological development, where needed. Over 40 updated workplans were submitted. All tier III workplans are available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/tierIII-indicators/. Workplans are currently missing for a few indicators that remain without an active custodian agency. If an indicator remains without a custodian agency, the Expert Group has indicated that it may be refined or removed at the comprehensive review in 2020.

B. Improving data flows and global data reporting for Sustainable Development Goals

17. In its decision 48/101 (para. (l)), the Statistical Commission requested the Expert Group to develop guidelines on how custodian agencies and countries can work together to contribute to the data flows necessary to have harmonized statistics. An initial drafting team was established at the fifth meeting of the Group in March 2017. Relevant key inputs were provided to this process. In this regard: (a) the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) developed a document outlining the guiding principles of data reporting and data sharing for the global monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was shared with the Expert Group in October 2017; (b) as requested by the Expert Group, a series of case studies on data flows and data reporting for seven representative global indicators were carried out to highlight the different ways in which data for these indicators flow from the national to the regional and international levels; and (c) the Economic Commission for Europe conducted data flow pilot studies designed to cover the experiences, needs and resources of the main actors involved in producing statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. The results of the studies were shared with the Group at its sixth meeting and the valuable inputs will be incorporated in the draft document.

18. The drafting team of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators presented a first draft of the document entitled "Guidelines and best practices on data flows and global data reporting for Sustainable Development Goals" at the Group's sixth meeting. It was decided to split the document into two parts, one on guidelines and the other on best practices (which would be constitute a "living document", to be updated when new experiences become available). Going forward, the drafting team will revise the guidelines on the basis of the feedback received from countries, agencies and stakeholders at the meeting and an updated draft will be circulated to both countries and custodian agencies, for an open consultation, in the period from December 2017 to 12 January 2018. Comments and inputs arising from the open consultation will be taken into consideration and a finalized document will be made available to the Statistical Commission, by 15 February 2018, as a background document for its forty-ninth session. A document on best practices with respect to the data flows between countries and custodian agencies will be prepared before the fiftieth session of the Commission in 2019.

19. In addition, two exercises were carried out with a view to improving data flows and global data reporting for Sustainable Development Goals. The first entailed the compilation of data-collection calendars. In accordance with Statistical Commission decision 48/101 (k), custodian agencies were requested to provide a list of national agencies providing data to the international system and share data-collection calendars in order to ensure the full traceability of data used in international sources. A form was sent to custodian agencies for tier I and tier II indicators in August 2017 by the Secretariat requesting information on agencies' data-collection processes, including a list of national entities providing data to the international system, periodicity of data collection and focal point information for the indicators. Information for over 100 indicators was received and will be made available in advance of the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/.

20. The second exercise entailed collection of information on Sustainable Development Goal data contact persons in national statistical offices. To assist in strengthening the central coordinating role of national statistical offices, the Secretariat requested voluntary contact information from those offices on a designated Sustainable Development Goal data contact person (or contact persons) who could be kept informed systematically through email on the times when custodian agencies were collecting, processing and disseminating data for Sustainable Development Goal indicators, including in those cases where the custodian agency's primary contact was in a line ministry. As of 1 December 2017, contact information had been received for more than 90 countries. The information will be shared with the international agencies responsible for the collection, processing and dissemination of Sustainable Development Goals-related data.

C. Sustainable Development Goal implementation at national, regional, global and thematic levels

21. At the sixth meeting of the Expert Group, countries, regional commissions, international agencies and stakeholders presented their experiences on Sustainable Development Goal implementation and reporting at national, regional, global and thematic levels.[1] Country presentations focused on sharing national experiences and challenges in implementing the indicator framework and Sustainable Development Goal reporting. Several regional organizations and international agencies shared regional and thematic experiences on Sustainable Development Goal monitoring. Many countries are developing national data platforms for Sustainable Development Goal reporting and are working closely with potential partners, including civil society organizations. One of the major challenges noted was related to data gaps for those indicators under the tier II and III categories. Additionally, information was provided on the work carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, in cooperation with the United Nations system, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as reflected in document E/CN.3/2018/3.

[1] Relevant documents are available, under agenda item 8, at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-06/ (Documents: Agenda item 8).

III. Working groups and work stream of the Expert Group

A. Working groups of the Expert Group

22. Three working groups were established by the Expert Group in March 2016, focusing on the following topics: Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX), geospatial information and interlinkages. Each working group is composed of members of the Expert Group and other invited representatives, as determined by their respective terms of reference.[2] A brief summary of the work of each group in 2017 and a description of future meetings and work are provided below.

1. Working group on Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX)

23. The working group on Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX), chaired by Colombia, consists of 12 country members and 10 international agency members. The working group will develop a data structure definition or data structure definitions and a metadata structure definition or metadata structure definitions for all Sustainable Development Goal indicators, which will be used to report on and disseminate the Sustainable Development Goal indicators at the national and international levels. Challenges faced by the working group entail, inter alia, the diversity of and possible changes to the Sustainable Development Goal indicators; the need to address the issue of ability to report and disseminate at multiple levels; the vast number and diversity of stakeholders and counterparts; and the need to ensure that countries are able to adapt the data structure definition or definitions suited to their own needs.

24. The working group has conducted monthly teleconferences. Its second meeting, held in October 2017, focused on (a) disaggregation; (b) remaining code lists; and (c) metadata concepts and metadata structure definition or definitions. Moving forward, the working group planned to develop initial data structure definitions by the end of 2017. It would then conduct a pilot data exchange in the first quarter of 2018, followed by a production phase of data exchange in the fourth quarter of 2018. The development of a metadata structure definition or metadata structure definitions is also planned for the fourth quarter of 2018.

2. Working group on geospatial information

25. The working group on geospatial information currently consists of 16 country members and six international agency members (further information is available at the working group website (http://ggim.un.org/UNGGIM-wg6/)). At its third meeting, held in Kunming, China, from 6 to 8 May 2017, the working group, co-chaired by Mexico and Sweden, deliberated on issues related to disaggregation according to geographical location, and data availability for production of indicators. The group recognized that disaggregation of national statistical data can be strengthened considerably through deployment of the "geographical location" lens, and that there was a need to demonstrate the availability and usability of geospatial information, including Earth observations for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring.

26. The working group held a fourth meeting, in New York from 6 to 8 December 2017, to generate progress in its work on disaggregation and data availability. The

[2] The terms of reference, membership and other important information for each working group can be found at http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/.

meeting considered additional issues including liaising with and contributing to the work of custodian agencies and capacity development for national statistical systems in geostatistical processes. The meeting concluded with an agreement to focus on task streams on disaggregation according to geographical location and aggregation of geocoded unit-level data and "production-ready" data for indicators. Other tasks will focus on issues related to working with custodian agencies, availability and usability of geospatial information, case studies and exemplars, and capacity development.

3. Working group on interlinkages

27. The working group on interlinkages currently consists of 11 country members and eight representatives from academia, international and regional organizations and civil society organizations. The group, which is co-chaired by Canada and China, conducts most of its meetings by WebEx and through email. The working group has focused on identifying possible interlinkages within the global indicator framework. An open global consultation was launched by the working group in November 2017, with the aim of identifying interlinkages, integrated analyses, and areas and frameworks that can facilitate the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. The group plans to report back to the Expert Group in the second quarter of 2018 on the results of the consultation and its plan for developing best practices and strategies for harnessing those interlinkages.

4. Joint subgroup of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

28. In addition to the three working groups, there exists a joint subgroup of the Expert Group and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is developing a plan to address immediate priorities, including statistical capacity-building. The group, which is in partnership with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) and supported by the Statistics Division, will conduct a survey on capacity-building from December 2017 to January 2018 with a view to providing an overview of the types of capacity-building activities needed and will consider a financing mechanism.[1]

B. Work stream on data disaggregation

29. In paragraph j of its decision 48/101, the Statistical Commission welcomed the work stream on data disaggregation. Under its work programme (see E/CN.3/2017/2, para. 35 (d)), the Expert Group was tasked with developing further guidance on the issue of data disaggregation. In pursuance of that goal, the Group formed a data disaggregation drafting team to develop a more detailed workplan for the data disaggregation work stream and an initial stocktaking document. The drafting team, which consists of nine country members led by Germany and Ghana, held several virtual meetings and a physical meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations World Data Forum in January 2017.

30. The Expert Group developed a document containing a stocktaking analysis of availability of data disaggregation in the global Sustainable Development Goals

[1] For more information on the joint subgroup, see E/CN.3/2018/4.

database and an overview of existing and possible standards of disaggregation. The Group also identified key challenges on which to focus. The Group planned to establish a mechanism for collaboration and consultation with specialized groups and custodian agencies in relation to specific data disaggregation dimensions (e.g., age, sex and disability) in December 2017. The Group will prepare a background document on data disaggregation for consideration by the Statistical Commission at its fiftieth session in 2019.

IV. Annual refinements and a timeline for the 2020 comprehensive review

31. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/313 and the plan and criteria agreed by the Expert Group with respect to possible annual minor refinements,[4] the Group reviewed the list of indicators proposed by its members for possible refinements. At its sixth meeting, the Expert Group proposed four annual refinements based on the agreed criteria. The list of those refinements is set out in annex II to this report.

32. The Expert Group established a timeline for the 2020 comprehensive review. The proposed timeline can be broken down as follows: (a) from December 2017 to February 2018, the Group will review the current list of 37 possible additional indicators for 33 targets,[5] to determine which should be included in an open consultation; (b) by end 2018, an open consultation on the proposed possible additional indicators will be launched; (c) by mid-2019, the Group will review indicators and propose changes and possible deletions based on the criteria set out in the 15 December 2016 report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/2017/2, para. 22) and carry out an open consultation; (d) by September 2019, the Group will review the results of the consultations and give preference to those proposals including an established methodology and available data; and (e) by end 2019, the Group will prepare the final proposal for the 2020 review for the consideration of the Commission.

V. Work programme of the Expert Group

33. It is suggested that the Expert Group carry out the following activities between March 2018 and March 2019:

(a) Continue the review of workplans for tier III indicators and reclassify indicators when requirements are met, at the two physical meetings and through WebEx meetings every two months, if needed;

(b) Conduct an open consultation and finalize the proposal for additional indicators to be presented as part of the comprehensive review, for consideration by the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session in 2020;

[4] See E/CN.3/2017/2, para. 21.

[5] See E/CN.3/2017/2, annex V, entitled "Possible additional indicators for inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goal indicators".

(c) Begin work on the comprehensive review by compiling a preliminary list of possible changes, refinements and deletions for the indicator framework for an open consultation in mid-2019;

(d) Continue the work of the joint subgroup of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by reviewing data availability and capacity-building needs for tier I and II indicators;

(e) Establish a mechanism for discussion with specialized groups and custodian agencies on specific data disaggregation dimensions (e.g., age, sex and disability) and finalize a document for consideration at the fiftieth session of the Statistical Commission in 2019;

(f) Support the continuation of the work of the three working groups, on Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange, geospatial information and interlinkages;

(g) Develop a living document on best practices for the data flows between countries and custodian agencies;

(h) Hold two meetings, one in the first and the second in the fourth quarter of 2018, on dates to be determined, and continue to interact electronically and through teleconferences, as needed.

VI. Points for discussion

34. **The Statistical Commission is invited to:**

(a) **Take note of the work conducted by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in response to the decisions of the Statistical Commission;**

(b) **Express its views and adopt the annual refinements of some indicators in the global indicator framework, as presented in annex II to this report; and express its views on the guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for Sustainable Development Goals, as contained in the background document;**

(c) **Express its views and adopt the proposed work programme of the Expert Group for 2018.**

Annex I

Updated list of members of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

Chair of the Statistical Commission*

- Brazil

Eastern Africa

- Ethiopia
- United Republic of Tanzania

Middle and Southern Africa

- Botswana
- Cameroon

Western Africa

- Ghana
- Niger

Northern Africa

- Algeria
- Egypt

Western Asia

- Bahrain

Central, Eastern, Southern and South-Eastern Asia

- China
- India
- Tajikistan
- Philippines

Oceania

- Fiji
- Samoa

Caribbean

- Grenada
- Trinidad and Tobago

Central and South America

- Brazil
- Colombia
- Mexico

* The Chair of the Statistical Commission is an ex officio member of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

Eastern Europe

- Belarus
- Russian Federation

Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe

- Canada
- France
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Sweden

Annex II

Annual refinements to be made to the global indicator framework

Goals and targets (from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)	Refinement of indicator
Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	
1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognized documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure	1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure
Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	
6.2.1 Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water	6.2.1 Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water
Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	
16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months	16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months
Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development	
17.17.1 Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private partnerships and civil society partnerships	17.17.1 Amount of United States dollars committed to (a) public-private partnerships and (b) civil society partnerships